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AUSTRALIA

SEPTEMBER 1995 \$4.95 NUMBER 18



THEY STILL CALL AUSTRALIA HOME



*Now generation: Paul Okon • Jason Van Blerk
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As the National Soccer League prepares for the biggest challenge since its inception – fulfilling the vision of the game's new-look administration – our leading players continue a last-minute push to join the likes of Baggio, Weah, Romario, Cantona and Aurelio Vidmar on financially greener pastures overseas.

In this issue of *Soccer Australia*, Laurie Schwab presents a comprehensive report about the exodus of our soccer voyagers. Despite the tyranny of distance, they will never stop calling Australia home.

Ray Gatt profiles the now generation of Socceroos and Roy Hay provides valuable advice to aspiring professional players, both men and women.

Philip Micallef takes us on a trip to England where he discovers the rebirth of a soccer nation.

All in all, it is another informative and exciting issue of Australia's most innovative soccer magazine – *Soccer Australia*. Enjoy!

Ettore Flacco
Editor-in-Chief

4 Let the battle begin

1995/96 NSL Competition

6 They still call Australia home

Aussies playing abroad

8 Player Profile

Paul Okon » Coca-Cola Socceroo

9 Player Profile

Jason Van Blerk » Coca-Cola Socceroo

10 Player Profile

Farewell to Frank Farina » Brisbane Strikers, former Coca-Cola Socceroo

11 Poster

Brisbane Strikers

12 Youth Football

Do you want to be a professional?

14 Swedish Lessons

Female Socceroos

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16 Poster

Mark Bosnich » Coca-Cola Socceroo

18 Poster

Paul Ince » Manchester United » Inter Milan

22 George Weah

We look at the Liberian super star

27 National Soccer League

A brief look at some interesting facts

29 Coach Profile

Branko Culina » Sydney United

30 World Football

England-rebirth of a soccer nation

33 The Genius

Dejan Savicevic » AC Milan

34 Soccer Australia Directory



LET THE BATTLE BEGIN

It won't be long before the heavyweights of Australian soccer start slugging it out again. Since last season there has been a myriad of player and coaching moves, and in this article Laurie Schwab analyses all the off-season moves of the NSL clubs.

THE two National Soccer League newcomers, Canberra Cosmos and Newcastle Breakers, face a daunting task preparing for the 1995-96 season - but spare a thought also for the Melbourne Knights.

MELBOURNE KNIGHTS



Last season's champions have to find replacements for their two best players, Mark Viduka and Steve Horvat, and perhaps also Adrian Cervinski who is appealing against a 12-month ban for having refused a drug test.

Cervinski was to have taken the place of Viduka who has joined Dinamo Zagreb but if he is also unavailable, the Knights might be left with only one senior striker, Joe Spiteri, if Ollie Pondeljak also achieves his ambition of joining an overseas club.

And there is no one in the league capable of filling the sweeper's position the way Horvat did. With Horvat having joined Hajduk Split, perhaps the Knights will look to Croatia for a replacement; otherwise Ante Kovacevic, recruited last year from St Albans, might be thrust into that role.

However, coach Mirko Bazic also has his eye on a couple of defenders from Croatia and expects to welcome back midfielder Kresimir Marusic who shone for the Knights for part of last season after arriving from Croatia to replace Josip Biskic who had joined Selangor of Malaysia.

The Knights are also likely to make bids for some of the players of the two axed Melbourne clubs, Heidelberg and the Zebras - Ransford Banini, for instance.

Adelaide City is rumored to be interested in the Knights' left back, Fausto DeAmicis, as a possible replacement for Tony Vidmar who has joined Dutch club NAC Breda, and Danny Tiatto is said to have a chance of playing in Italy.

Despite the need for reinforcements, the Knights remain a formidable outfit, with talented young players such as Damir Grganovic, Damjan Vojtek and Tom Bacak lurking in the wings and St Albans defender Mick Colina determined to persuade the coach to give him a try.

Watch out for a blockbusting season by captain Andrew Marth if he remains injury-free, and further improvement from Mark Silic and Vinko Buljubasic, both destined for bright international careers.

ADELAIDE CITY



The losing grand finalist of last season has lost Tony Vidmar to Holland and Sergio Melta who has retired after serving the club since the NSL began in 1977.

Sasa Nedeljkovic, the former Red Star Belgrade full back who played a handful of matches for Heidelberg United last season, seems certain to replace Melta in the right back position.

Apart from showing interest in DeAmicis, Adelaide City's new coach, John Perin, has also made inquiries about South Melbourne striker Ivan Kelic.

But changes at Adelaide City will be minimal as usual, since it is on stability that the club bases its success.

Whether the team's style of play changes slightly as a result of Perin taking over from Zoran Matic remains to be seen, but in essence, the two seem to have similar philosophies.

Younger players might be seen a little more often but the backbone of the team remains unaltered: Jason Petkovic in goal, Milan Ivanovic as sweeper, Alex Tobin as stopper, Goran Lozanovski and Craig Foster in midfield and Damian Mori and Brad Hassell up front. Joe Mullen turns 32 in January but has at least another season left in him.

BRISBANE STRIKERS



Frank Farina will do as much for the Strikers off the field as on it. Since the club signed him from Lille of France, the Strikers' popularity quotient has gone through the roof.

Farina's presence, combined with the Strikers' move from Perry Park to the prestigious Suncorp Stadium, will place them firmly into Queensland's public consciousness - and that is a place no Brisbane team has been.

Farina, 30, originally from Cairns, has been playing in Europe for the past seven years.

He was Belgium's top scorer in 1989-90 while with Club Bruges, had a brief stint with Italian club Bari after being sold for \$2.9 million, and has since played in France for Strasbourg and Lille.

Before leaving Australia, he played for Canberra City and Sydney Hakoah and was league top scorer in 1987 and 1988 while with Marconi. He was voted 1988 Oceania footballer of the year.

His recent game against Ghana was his 77th for Australia since 1984 - and his last. To mark the occasion, he was Soccerroo captain for the day.

Brisbane Strikers chairman Ian Brusasco said: "Frank's signing will do wonders for the club. Younger players in Queensland will be able to see Frank in action and realise they too can have a great future in the game."

The only other newcomer to the Strikers' senior squad so far is young striker Reece Tollenaere, who has been promoted after top-scoring for the club's youth team last season.

Although Tollenaere will vie strongly for senior selection, it is more likely that Rod Brown will partner Farina in attack. By scoring nine goals last season - as did team-mate Chris Slater - Brown brought his NSL tally to 106 and became, along with John Kosmina, Marshall Soper and Gary Cole, one of only four players to have topped the century.

The Strikers have lost Alun Evans

who has returned to New Zealand, Brad Ditton who has gone to England in search of a professional career, and Andy Stowell who has returned to Brisbane Lions.

CANBERRA COSMOS



The Cosmos leadership has been involved in feverish discussions with Canberra Deakin about whether and to what extent, Deakin will back the new NSL club.

Those discussions will determine, among other things, whether Deakin players will be available to Cosmos - an important consideration since Deakin has the best players in the ACT.

Cosmos president, Ron Watkins, says that ACT players will make up at least 75 per cent of the new club's playing staff, with only minimal recruits from elsewhere. Among such possible recruits, as we went to press, was Soccerroo captain Paul Wade, who had also been talking with Newcastle Breakers and Morwell Falcons.

The ACT federation, of which Watkins has been president for six years, owns 50 per cent of the Cosmos. Up to a million shares in the remaining equity is available to individuals and companies at \$1 a share.

Co-operative ownership, Watkins said, would ensure that the Cosmos survived in the NSL, whereas Canberra City (1977-85), Canberra Olympic (1986) and Queanbeyan club Inter Monaro (1985-86) all failed.

"Those were single-club entities while we are reflective of all the ACT clubs as well as several licensed social clubs. We are spreading the cost," Watkins said.

Bruce Stadium, home of Canberra City when the NSL kicked off in 1977, will be the Cosmos' headquarters and home matches will be played under lights on Saturday nights, partly to stimulate tourism by having visiting teams and their supporters staying overnight.

The team's colors will be blue, orange and white and the uniform will carry a series of stars signifying, according to Watkins, how high the Cosmos are shooting. Senator Bob McMullan is the club's No 1 ticket holder, and the first deputy president of the Senate, Margaret Reid, is a patron of the ACT federation.

Coach is Mike Lyons, recruited from Brunei in the Malaysian league.

MARCONI



Manfred Schaefer, who has taken over from Andrea Icardi as Marconi's coach, has transfer listed Ian Gray, Tommy McCulloch, Kimon Taliadoros and Marshall Soper who, between them, boast 112 appearances for Australia.

Young defender Paul Dee is also available for transfer.

Taliadoros has joined Sydney Olympic in an exchange deal for Brad Maloney and Schaefer also has signed midfielder Eric Hristoudolou from Sydney United and Chilean midfielder Ramon Clement, formerly with Colo Colo and recently of Rockdale.

Schaefer also has had preliminary talks with Victorian Will Hastie who has been playing in Scotland, and there is a possibility that Angelo Colombo might return from Italy for a second NSL season.

Whether or not Steve Corica would sign for a German club remained in doubt as we went to press.

Schaefer, who is looking for a midfielder, defender and striker, makes no secret of his admiration for South Melbourne's Paul Trimball, and would jump at the chance to sign him if Trimball and South were willing.

Former youth international defender, Aaron Holst, will be a more regular starter for Marconi next season and Jon Angelucci, Jeremy Harris and Mark Robertson will also vie strongly for regular selection.



MORWELL FALCONS

Despite earlier speculation to the contrary, the Falcons appear to have held onto most of their players, except for Steve Douglas who has joined Victorian Premier League club Werribee City and perhaps goalkeeper Vince Matassa who has indicated he would be willing to join Sydney United.

John Markovski trialled in Europe but nothing had come of it as we went to press, while Ernie Tapai appeared to be doing quite nicely, living and working in the LaTrobe Valley.

Sonny Sevin and Shaun Parton are set to return after guest stints with Albion and Richmond respectively, and Brian Bothwell and Marcus Stergiopoulos will resume once they return from Brunei in the Malaysian league. Similarly, Warren Spink is expected back from the Darwin Cubs.

Harry Bingham remains the coach but the club's soccer manager, Bobby McLachlan, has left to coach Brunel.

NEWCASTLE BREAKERS



The reborn Breakers' first capture has been coach John Kosmina, the Socceroos' all-time top scorer with 46 goals and top-scoring NSL player with 133.

Kosmina was expected, as we went to press, to make announcements about his recruiting targets, many of them from the local Newcastle competition.

These included Andy Roberts, the left back from Edgeworth who has considerable NSL experience, as has Ralph Maier of Azzurri Highfield.

Other recruiting targets from Azzurri were likely to be midfielders Troy Halpin and Mark Wilson and defender Gary Wilson, as well as David Lowe who has scored 73 NSL goals for Marconi, Parramatta Eagles, Newcastle KB United and the Breakers.

Top talent at Adamstown Rosebud includes young striker Clayton Zane and midfielder Scott Thomas, as well as defenders Adam Sanderson and Shane Price, while the Newcastle league's top scorer, Peter Budden of Weston, is also likely to be seen at Breakers' trials.

One player the Breakers are sure to sign is striker Damian Smith who wants to return home from Sydney Olympic, having previously played for Adamstown.

Forced by excessive debts to withdraw from the NSL last season, the Breakers are operating under a new company - Newcastle Breakers Pty Ltd - with 15 shareholders and a five man board. Managing director is Pat Clarke.

The club is negotiating with Channel 10 and NBN for television coverage and also has the support of radio 2HD and the Newcastle Morning Herald.

Home ground is the Breakers Stadium, which will be renamed after a sponsor soon to be announced.

SOUTH MELBOURNE



Vaughan Coveny from Wollongong City will provide South with fire power from the midfield - something it has been lacking in recent seasons.

Coveny, 23, scored 12 goals for the Wolves last season, after switching from the Melbourne Knights. A New Zealand international, he previously played for Miramar Rangers.

But before the transfer is finalised, an ASF tribunal must set a realistic compensation fee for Coveny, who currently is listed at \$45,000.

South coach Frank Arok points out that no player is worth that much in Australia, since the transfer and compensation fee system is to be scrapped next year.

Arok also is interested in centre back Sasa Mrkic of Yugoslav first division club

Radnicki Nis, where South sweeper Alex Kuzmanovic played before he came to Australia.

And Arok also has agreed on terms with Australian under 17 international Daniel Allsopp, a striker similar to Mark Viduka in build, after transfer-listing Francis Awaritefe and midfielder Jason Polak.

More recruits are on the way and Arok makes no bones about his intentions in 1995-96. "We're here with one aim and one aim only - to win the league," he declared.

SYDNEY OLYMPIC



New coach David Ratcliffe has signed centre back Nick Oric from Parramatta Eagles, midfielder Walter Ardone from Heidelberg United and Kimon Taliadoros of Marconi.

Adam Clantar of Parramatta also could be on Ratcliffe's shopping list.

Olympic's top players will again be Joe Bacak, David Barrett, Peter Tsekentis and Branko Milosevic.

SYDNEY UNITED



Having lost goalkeeper Zeljko Kalac, midfielder Eric Hristoudolou and full back Paul Bilokapic among others, coach Branko Culina has been applying himself studiously to the task of finding replacements.

One of his targets is believed to have been West Adelaide goalkeeper Peter Blazincic but latest indications were that Blazincic would remain in South Australia. Vince Matassa of the Morwell Falcons and Western Australian state goalkeeper Tom Maras are other possible replacements for Kalac.

The major task facing Culina is to develop a regular goalscorer, since only five clubs scored fewer goals than United last season.

The club's top scorers of last season were David Zdrilic and Manis Lamond with seven each, and Ante Milicic with six.

Mario Jerman could well do better than both of them if given more matches.

Apart from Kalac - who has joined Leicester City for \$1.7 million - Hristoudolou and Bilokapic, United also has lost Ljupco Naumovski to Wollongong Macedonia and Ivan Petkovic who has hung up his boots to coach the club's youth team.

Moreover, Manis Lamond was being pursued by Malaysian club Negri and defender Velimir Kupresak had not agreed on terms as we went to press.

Culina's possible recruits include Gabriel Mendez from Parramatta Eagles, Robert Enes and Rob Trajkovski of the Melbourne Zebras, Aytek Genc who is playing in Malaysia and Chris Zoricich from the Brisbane Strikers.

Culina also has spoken to former Melbourne Knights and Preston midfielder Robert Markovac, who has been playing in Belgium and Croatia, but so far no deal has been struck.

WEST ADELAIDE



Stan Lazaridis is a recruiting target of West Ham United, Queen's Park Rangers and Aris, and George Sifkas has decided to return to Melbourne where he used to play for Heidelberg United and Preston.

The balance of West's squad remains intact and coach Raul Blanco is satisfied with the club's prospects for next season, particularly if he manages to pick up a few recruits who, as yet, remain unidentified.

Jose Friarte is set for a return to his true form after a lacklustre 1994-95 season. His partnership with Cyrille Ndong-Keller will be the most lethal weapon in West's armoury.

It should also be a big season for Richard Alagich, who has shown flashes of brilliance, while Blanco also is looking for improvement from Pablo Cardozo.

WOLLONGONG CITY



New coach Berti Mariani has a lot of work to do in finding solutions for the departure of Vaughan Coveny, Adrian Cervinski and possibly Saso Dimoski who, like Cervinski, is appealing against a one-year ban for having refused to take a drug test at training.

The Wolves have signed goalkeeper Frank Mikuletic from APIA and may also gain Tommy McCulloch from Marconi.

Martin Ackers will shoulder most of the responsibility up front, and Peter Murray and Mike O'Shea will provide a wealth of experience in defence.

Mineo Bonetig has always had more potential than his fragmented seasons have suggested, and Horsley has firmly established himself among the top midfielders in the country, but all that does not diminish the brutal fact that Wollongong needs more - much more - to challenge the league's leading lights. *

They still call



Mark Viduka

The number of Australians playing overseas seems to increase every month. It's a difficult task trying to keep track of who is playing where. Here Laurie Schwab compiles a report on the foreign exodus.

Although Joe Marston and John Roberts, among others, had played for clubs in England, it was not until 1974, during the World Cup finals in Germany, that Australian-based players first attracted the attention of clubs on the continent.

Most of the recruiting activity concerned Adrian Alston, who was impressive in the Socceroos' three group matches against East Germany, West Germany and Chile. His fellow striker, Branko Buljevic, also attracted interest.

Hamburg talked to both players, while Alston also attracted interest from Eintracht Frankfurt and Hertha BSC of Berlin.

But it was British club Luton Town that eventually signed Alston for a \$20,000 transfer fee from Wollongong club Safeway United. Ironically, it was from British club Preston North End that Alston had come to Australia. Later, he would play for Cardiff City and the Tampa Bay Rowdies in the United States before returning to Australia.

Alston's move to Britain was big, big news at the time.

Today, almost 100 Australians ply their trade with clubs all over the world and news of yet another one heading abroad causes hardly a ripple, except in extraordinary circumstances, such as Zeljko Kalac's recent move from Sydney United to Leicester City for \$1.7 million.

Kalac stole a march on Mark Viduka of the Melbourne Knights, since Viduka had been predicted to be the first to break the \$1 million mark.

Viduka joined Dinamo Zagreb for \$510,000 after scoring in his first trial match there and subsequently attracting rave reviews.

Other recent moves, which had been either completed or subject to final signatures, included those of Tony Vidmar from Adelaide City to NAC Breda of Holland for \$300,000, Paul Bilokapic from Sydney United to Hajduk Split for \$150,000, Steve Horvat from Melbourne Knights to Hajduk Split for \$122,000, Josip Skoko from North Geelong to Hajduk Split for an expected \$40,000 and Vasco Trpceviski from Altona Gate to Pasos De Ferreira for an undisclosed amount and Peter Tsolakidis from Heidelberg United to Kalamaria of Greece for \$30,000.

Steve Corica of Marconi, Danny Tiatto of the Melbourne Knights, Stan Lazaridis of West Adelaide and Tony Popovic of Sydney United were others with a chance of landing overseas contracts.

In the previous wave of the exodus, Carl Veart and Doug Hodgson went to Sheffield United and Mehmet Durakovic and Josip Blazic to Malaysia.

The record transfer overseas before Kalac made his move was that of Ned Zelic to Borussia Dortmund for \$600,000 in 1992.

Overseas clubs have paid about \$3 million for Australian players over the past year and more than \$7 million in total.

And because of the incredible success over the years of Aurelio Vidmar, Frank Farina, Zelic, Robbie Slater, Eddie Krncevic, Jim Patikas, Lou Hristoudolou and others, European talent scouts are becoming increasingly preoccupied with the fertile Australian breeding ground.

But a significant change has come over the relationship between Europe and Australia. Whereas local players were once seen as bargain-basement buys, Australian clubs are now demanding much more realistic fees.

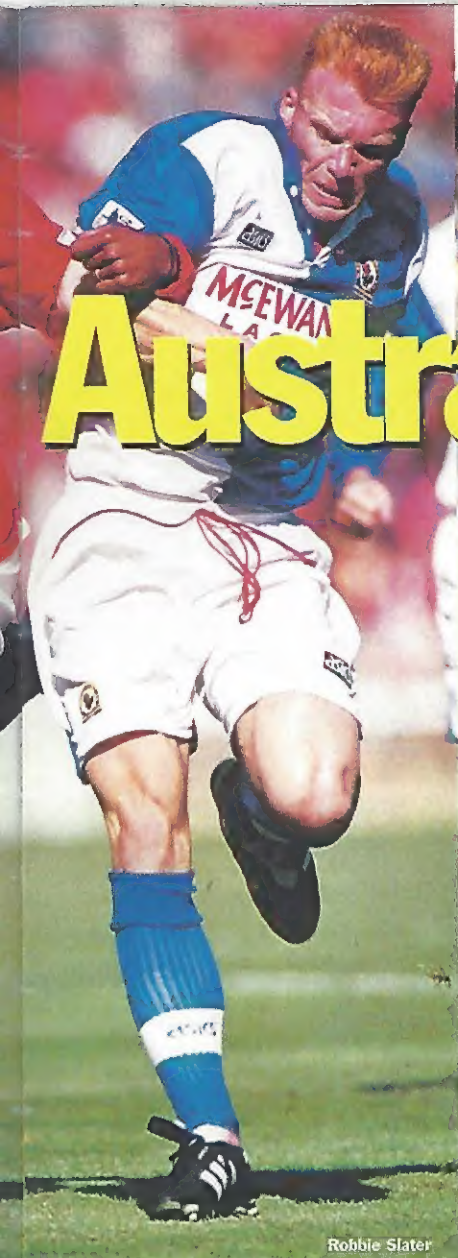
Such fees should help to slow the exodus, thus protecting our national league from the plunder, at least partly.

Still, the damage to the local game has been enormous. Without our best players, we are the equivalent of a movie studio without stars - and it is stars that customers pay to see.



Mark Bosnich

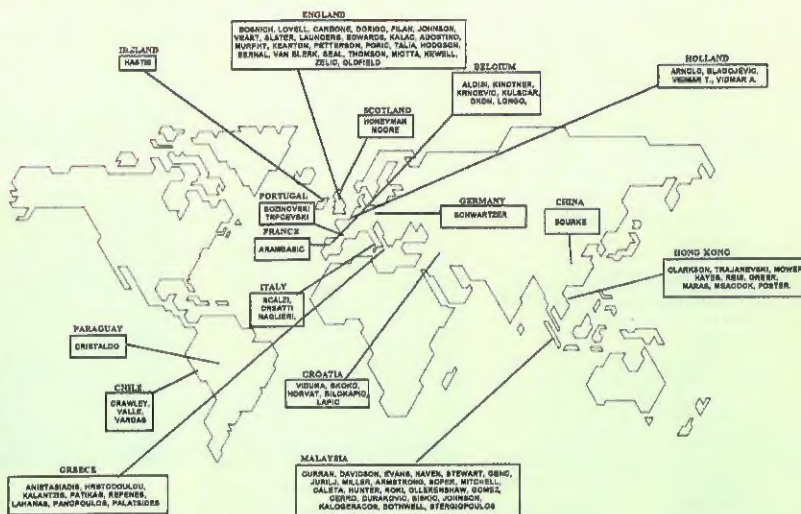
Australia home



Robbie Slater



Graham Arnold



* Details (provided by the ASE) were correct at the time of printing.

What follows is a compilation of Australians overseas. Since it is constantly subject to change caused by players changing clubs, it probably contains a few inaccuracies but it does illustrate the magnitude of the talent drain.

CROATIA Steve Horvat, Paul Bilokapic, Josip Skoko, Paul Lopic (all Hajduk Split); Mark Viduka (Dinamo Zagreb).

GERMANY Mark Schwarzer (Kaiserslautern).

GREECE Lou Hristodoulou (Panathinaikos), Chris Kalantzis (Olympiakos), Joe Palatsides (Kalamaria), Jim Patikas (Kastoria), Steve Refenes (Panionios), Peter Lahanas (Apollon), John Anastasiadis (PAOK Salonica), Peter Tsolakis (Kalamaria - to be confirmed), Mike Panopoulos (Aris).

BELGIUM Lorenz Kindtner (St Truiden), Graham Arnold (Charleroi), John Aloisi (Liege), Eddie Krncevic (Aalst), George Kulcar (Antwerp), Paul Okon (Club Brugge), Dominic Longo (Cercle Brugge).

ENGLAND Ned Zelic (Queen's Park Rangers), Zeljko Kalac, David Oldfield (Leicester City), Mark Bosnich (Aston Villa), Stewart Lovell, Andrew Bernal (both Reading), Tony Dorigo (Leeds), Shaun Murphy (Notts County), Carl Veart, Doug Hodgson (Sheffield United), Tony Carbone (Notts Forest), John Filan (Coventry City), Adem Poric (Sheffield Wednesday), Robbie Slater, Frank Talia (Blackburn Rovers), David Seal, Paul Agostino (Bristol City), Jason Kearon (Everton), Richard Johnson (Watford), Andy Petterson (Charlton), Alister Edwards, Jason van Blerk (Millwall), Brian Launder (Crystal Palace), Adrian Thompson (Walsall), Simon Miotto (Blackpool), Harry Kewell (Leeds Utd).

MALAYSIA Alan Davidson (Pahang), Mehmet Durakovic, Josip Biskic, David Mitchell (Selangor), Scott Ollershaw (Sabah), Lachlan Armstrong (Malacca), Brian Bothwell, Marcus Stergiopoulos (Brunel), Aytsek Genc (Johor), Marshall Soper, Gus Cerro, Joe Caleta, David Miller (Perak), Jeff Curran, John Hunter, Dave Evans, Craig Navan (Sarawak), Darren Stewart (Johor), Glen Johnson (Jaohor Skenj), Vas Kalogeracos (Kuala Lumpur).

PARAGUAY Victor Cristaldo (Sports Colombia).

ARGENTINA Leo Langone (River Plate).

CHILE John Crawley (Colo Colo), Andy Vargas, Dion Valle (Colo Colo).

CHINA Martin Bourke (Guangzhou Apollo).

FRANCE Zlatko Arambasic (Metz).

HOLLAND Tony Vidmar (NAC Breda), Aurelio Vidmar (Feyenoord).

HONG KONG David Clarkson (Happy Valley), Trisram Morgan (Kitchee Sports), Alan Reis, Ross Greer, Tony Maras (South China).

IRELAND Willie Hastie.

ITALY Steve Orsatti (Pescara), Christian Vieri, Edward Scalz (Napoli), Sebastian Nagtieri.

PORTUGAL Vlado Bozinovski, Vasco Trpceviski (Pasos De Ferreira).

SCOTLAND Craig Moore (Rangers).

Okon on display

It hasn't taken long, but Paul Okon has already established himself as one of the most talented Aussies abroad. He spoke to Ray Gatt.

Who would ever have thought it? An Australian soccer player worth, wait for it, \$8 million.

No, it's not a typographical error. That's the amount a German club was prepared to fork out to buy the wondrous talents of Belgian-based Coca-Cola Soccerroo Paul Okon.

My, how things change. There was a time when our young stars would have been quite happy to pay out of their own pocket for the chance to play in Europe.

Now, the European clubs are clamouring to get their hands on the rich talents of our players - at any price.

And that is especially so with the gifted Okon, who many claim to be - along with Aurelio Vidmar - our best performed overseas-based player at the moment.

The kid from Fairfield in Sydney's south western suburbs has travelled far on the road to stardom since plying his wares with Marconi in the National Soccer League four years ago.

That he is now on the verge of fame and fortune in world football is without question.

Certainly, that was reinforced when he turned on a truly superb one-man show for Australia against Ghana at the Sydney Football Stadium in June. Anyone lucky enough to see that display would have been left in no doubt as to his credentials for the international stage.

To say Okon was outstanding would be an injustice. He was better than that

as he orchestrated proceedings in the middle of the field.

Okon seemed to have a mountain of time on the ball and his reading of the play was often two or three steps ahead of his opponents. Such poise, such skill, such class!

It was a performance that left national coach Eddie Thomson almost speechless.

"Paul was so dominant. Everything he did was touched with class. There's no doubting he has the football world at his feet," Thomson said.

Thomson must be laughing. He is going to be blessed with some outstanding talent when the next World Cup qualifiers come around in 1997.

Okon, Ned Zelic and even the ageless Milan Ivanovic could be fighting it out for the sweeper's role. Maybe all three can be fitted into the team!

It's a headache Thomson will be happy to have.

Okon, however, does not care where he plays, though Thomson is, at this stage anyway, leaning towards using him in the playmaker's role in the middle of the park.

It's a position Okon can handle with ease as he showed against Ghana.

But it is in the sweeper's role that he has made his name in Belgium with Club Bruges. Okon had a phenomenal season with Bruges, winning wide acclaim as one of the best liberos in the league.

Veteran Soccerroo, Graham Arnold, goes so far as to say he is the best in Belgium and adds he could go on to be the best in Europe.

"Paul had a fantastic season," Arnold, who plays in Holland but gets to see the Belgian league on television, said recently. "Believe me, he is good. They rave about him over there."

For his part, Okon takes all the praise in his stride. Thankfully, the big time has not affected his good nature and pleasant manner. His feet are firmly on the ground and he remains as personable and unassuming as ever.

"Look, I still have a long way to go to prove myself," he said. "Sure, I had a good season, but really, it was the first season I had in the top team."

"The real test will come next season. Your opponents get to know your style of play better and can pick your weak-

nesses much more easily."

It's understandable that Okon wants to keep firm control of his destiny.

Like most young Australian soccer stars, he found the going tough when he first ventured to Club Bruges.

His first two seasons were over and he hardly got a smell of top grade football. A serious knee injury did not help, nor did the fact he left the club to link with the Olyroos at the Barcelona Olympics.

Certainly, Bruges have not made it easy for him to pursue his career with the Coca-Cola Soccerroos and they actually stopped him from going to Argentina with Australia last month.

Thankfully, however, Paul is determined to play as often as possible for Australia as he has done with the Young Soccerroos and Olyroos.

Indeed, it was his performances with the Young Soccerroos at the World Youth Championships in Portugal in 1991 that brought him to the notice of the European talent scouts.

As for the \$8 million offer, it was not surprising that Bruges turned it down flat. They were not prepared to let such a valuable player go - not just yet anyway.

And what did Paul think of the offer?



factfile

NAME Paul Okon **AGE** 23
DOB 05.04.72 **POSITION** Sweeper
CLUB Bruges (Belgium)
HEIGHT 185 cms **WEIGHT** 80 kgs
A INTERNATIONALS 2 **GOALS** 0

"Sure, it was flattering," he said. "But, as I said, I still have to prove myself. Hopefully, I'll have another good season for Bruges. If I do I'm sure there'll be more interest from other clubs."

In the meantime, Paul was just happy to be re-united with his family - father Klaus senior, mother Cleo and brother Klaus junior.

The Okons are a close family and they have all spent time with Paul in Belgium.

"I needed this break," he said. "It is a physically and mentally demanding season over there. You need to be on top emotionally at the start of each season."

"Even during the season it is good when the family comes over to visit. It helps to pick you up, especially if things aren't going well." •

Jason's *just* fine

Jason Van Blerk may not have the profile of other Australians playing in Europe, but his recent appearances in the national team have shown him to be a classy performer. Ray Gatt reports.

He had a couple of good seasons in Holland and he won a regular spot with Millwall in England, but there is no doubting that Jason Van Blerk is our most under-rated Coca-Cola Soccerero.

Sadly, whenever our overseas-based stars get together to play for Australia, Van Blerk seems to become lost in the mad flurry as journalists rush to talk to the higher profile players like Zelic, Okon, Vidmar and Arnold.

And that is natural I suppose, for Van Blerk's exploits in Europe have rarely, if ever, attracted the hype back home that has followed our established stars.

But that's fine by Van Blerk. He is not worried about it.

Still refreshingly down-to-earth, Van Blerk is happy to go about his job and make a useful living in England with first division club Millwall.

"It (recognition) is not something that concerns me a great deal," he told Soccer Australia. "Getting your name in the newspapers or on television doesn't make you a better player and it doesn't make the coach like you more."

"Of course, there are times when I feel I should be paid more attention - that's natural - but if you are going to worry about it then it won't help your game".

Despite the low profile, Van Blerk still figures prominently when national coach Eddie Thomson assembles his Foreign Legion for matches.

Being a naturally left-sided player with speed and strength, Van Blerk plays an important part in Thomson's tactics. He uses his qualities to great effect, often bursting down the flank before looping in one of those dangerous crosses.

"I enjoy playing for the national team because Eddie gives me the scope to get down the flanks instead of concentrating solely on defence," he said. "I feel that going forward is the best part of my game."

Van Blerk showed another side to his make-up during the Coca-Cola Soccereros' 2-0 loss to Argentina in Argentina recently. He had one of his best games for the national team being heavily involved in the action, especially in defence where he did a mountain of work.

Jason has been happy with his lot in Europe, though he confessed his move to Millwall had come at the right time.

Surprisingly, he opted not to rejoin Dutch club Go Ahead Eagles, where he had two quite useful seasons. The club wanted to re-sign him, but he thought



long and hard.

"Really, I had done all I could in Holland," he said. "I needed a new challenge. I needed a change of scenery. I had become stale."

Van Blerk decided to look elsewhere and got in touch with Australian veteran David Mitchell, who was with Millwall.

At first, Mitchell was unable to do anything for Van Blerk. But he contacted him "out of the blue" one day to say he had arranged a trial for him.

Van Blerk did so well in the match against a Spanish club that Millwall signed him on the spot.

"It has always been an ambition of mine to play in England and I was thrilled when the opportunity finally came," he said.

Playing in the English first division has been a real eye-opener for him.

"It's a different world," he said. "People just don't realise the passion involved in the game over there. It's a way of life for them."

"Something like that just doesn't come across on television or in the newspapers. You have to experience it first hand."

Van Blerk eventually played 26 games in the top team after struggling in the early part of the season because of an

injury.

"It was a slow start, but I was delighted when I started to find my feet and broke into the firsts," he said.

Football has had its interesting moments as far as Van Blerk is concerned and he related a couple of incidents.

"We were playing Arsenal in an FA Cup tie and I went in hard in a tackle on Ian Wright," he recalled. "I took his legs from under him and he wasn't happy."

"He picked himself up off the ground, dusted himself off, then came charging at me. I thought I would cop one for sure."

"But he came face to face with me and said 'Who the #@@ are you, son?' Unfortunately, I didn't have a comeback."

Van Blerk also recounted a "minor clash" with Millwall manager Mick McCarthy.

"Again, it followed an FA Cup tie with Arsenal," Van Blerk said. "We were leading 1-0 with 10 minutes to go when I went up for a header in our own penalty area."

"Unfortunately, the ball only went as far as Tony Adams, who slammed a first time shot just wide of the goal. It was a golden chance for Arsenal to equalise."

factfile

FULL NAME Jason Van Blerk **AGE** 27
DOB 16.03.68 **POSITION** Defender
CLUB Millwall (England)
HEIGHT 186cms **WEIGHT** 76 kgs
A INTERNATIONALS 18 **GOALS** 1

"Anyway, we ended up scoring late in the game and won 2-0."

"Of course, I was feeling pretty happy in the dressing rooms later because I felt I had played well."

"While I was sitting down, McCarthy sidled over and asked how I was feeling. I said 'fine'. He then came a little closer and said, 'Jason, do you know what would have happened if they had scored from your clearance? I would have #1@# head-butted you'."

"Mitch saw the look on my face and just burst out laughing. To this day, I still don't know if Mick was joking or not."

Off the field, life is also rory for Van Blerk and his Australian wife.

"We are living close to London and the place is always on the go," he said. "We are really enjoying the lifestyle." •

Farina bids farewell

Frank Farina, one of Australian football's icons, has retired from the international scene. Ray Gatt pays tribute to one of the game's greats.



factfile

NAME Frank Farina **AGE** 30
DOB 05.09.64 **POSITION** Striker
CLUB Brisbane Strikers
HEIGHT 178cm **WEIGHT** 78kgs
A INTERNATIONALS 36 **GOALS** 10

Emotions overflowed when the Coca-Cola Socceroos lost one of their greatest servants following the retirement of veteran striker Frank Farina in June.

There could have been a no more fitting or just reward for Farina when almost 20,000 fans bade him a fond farewell in a match against Ghana at the Sydney Football Stadium.

He may not have scored a goal and he may have lost just a couple of centimetres in pace but there was no doubt that his competitive spirit and determination were enough to satisfy his loyal army of fans as the Socceroos sent him out a winner.

I don't think I'll forget the majesty and emotion of the moment when national coach Eddie Thomson motioned to the referee to stop the game with 15 minutes to go so that Farina could rightly – and proudly – accept the accolades of the players and crowd as he walked off the field for a well earned early shower.

With the entire stadium, including the press box, rising to its feet and applauding, Frank accepted champagne and flowers and sat on the bench with his 67th and final Socceroo appearance behind him.

The Australian Soccer Federation has often been criticised for its treatment of past and present players but it would seem they finally got it right when, with some persuasion from Thomson, they chose the farewell match for Farina. Let us hope that this will become a permanent feature whenever a Coca-Cola Socceroo great decides to retire.

But back to Frank... while the Ghana game signalled the end of his international career it is, in truth, the beginning of a new chapter for the Queenslander.

Farina has now decided to return to Australia after eight years in Europe and will finish his career where it all started – in the National Soccer League.

Not surprisingly he was the centre of a bidding war between one of his former



Australian clubs Marconi Fairfield and the Brisbane Strikers. Both clubs were desperate to get his services given that he was a valuable asset in two regards.

Firstly, his input on the field would be undoubted. At 31, he still has what it takes to be an awesome force and influential player in the NSL.

And secondly, and some might say more importantly, he is worth his weight in gold in terms of marketing, promotions and media exposure.

That he elected to sign with Brisbane may have surprised those south of the border, but those who know Farina say it was never in doubt. Once a Queenslander, always a Queenslander.

Understandably Farina, one of the genuine nice guys of the sport, is looking forward to the new challenge and "giving something back to the game" that has been much of his life.

"It was hard to say goodbye to Europe because I thought I had another year left in me over there," he said. "I had a good offer from a Belgian club and it was certainly tempting.

"But, really, the time was right to come home, especially with my wife Julie expecting our second child."

While he is looking forward to playing in the NSL again, Frank admits the chance to work in the sport off the field probably excites him more.

"Now that all the dramas that have held the game back here over the last 12 months or so are over I think we will really start to make some headway in Australian sport," he said.

"As we have said for so long, the potential for us out there is enormous. It is up to us to capitalise."

"I'm positive I can contribute to lifting the profile of Australian Soccer.

And what about his stint in Europe? Farina said he has no regrets even though he hit a few rocky patches in latter seasons.

He struggled to get into the first team at Lille in the French first division early in the just completed season, though he was playing regularly towards the end.

"Injuries and problems with team management did not help me over the last couple of seasons in Europe, but, by and large, my stint over there was enjoyable and fruitful," he said.

Farina made his name in Belgium with Club Bruges, where he won a reputation as an ace goalscorer, before an ill-fated and much publicised stint with Bari in the Italian Serie A.

He had a short stay with Notts County in England before linking with Strasbourg in France before joining Lille.

Farina jumped at the chance when Thomson asked him to play a farewell game against Ghana even though he officially retired after the World Cup qualifier against Argentina in Buenos Aires in 1993.

"That game (against Ghana) was a real buzz and an honour," he said. "It's something I'll never forget."

"I just hope the other guys who have given so much to the game are offered a similar honour.

But, for now Frank can at last start to enjoy himself after devoting most of his life to football. And Australian soccer, the NSL and the soccer playing kids of the country will be all the better for the return of one of our favourite sons.



So you want to be a professional football player? Roy Hay gives some tips on how to start out on the road to the big time.

Reaching for the top

For many young Australians today, the ambition is to become a professional soccer player and play with one of the great teams of the world like Ajax Amsterdam, A C Milan or Manchester United. New Australian Soccer Federation Chairman, David Hill, was taken aback to discover that when asked what their goals were, the majority of the 1995 Young Socceroos said that they wanted to go overseas and land a professional contract to play the game. He asked why can't they set their ambition to play for the Australian national team and stay in Australia to play with a top club here.

The answer is partly financial and partly to do with perceptions of where one can develop to the highest level. David Hill said, "The (National Soccer) League cannot progress unless, and until, we significantly increase the full time professional opportunities for players in Australia". He also proposed an arrangement whereby the NSL clubs and the ASF would jointly finance development scholarships aimed at talented young players.

You have to become an athlete as well as a soccer player to succeed at professional level.

Also at the Soccer Summit and in the Industrial Relations Tribunal, Kimon Taliadoros, Greg Brown and Brendan Schwab of the Australian Soccer Players Association argued for the introduction of full-time professionalism in Australian soccer as soon as possible. Brendan Schwab made the point that some young Australians who went overseas were very quickly disenchanted when they discovered the conditions under which they were expected to play. Some senior players with extensive overseas experience have said that if the rewards of playing soccer in Australia had been just a little bit better than they would have stayed here. If you want to get an idea of what life as a young professional can be like, read Craig Johnston's autobiography *Walk Alone*, especially Chapter Three, "Chasing the Dream". Read it and think whether you could face these challenges.

So how do you start on the ladder which leads to a professional soccer career? The first step is to make sure that this is really what you want to do. There will be sacrifices to make, heartaches and

disappointments along the way, long hours of training and effort. There is always the risk that your career may be cut short by injury at any time. So you must weigh up the risks and costs, and you should think about making sure you have some other skills or source of income, if soccer does not work out for you. The majority of senior soccer players overseas have a relatively short professional career, on average only two to five years, so you must start thinking about life after soccer before you even start.

You have to make things happen for yourself, not rely on others to do it for you. You have to be thick-skinned enough to take severe criticism, even the charge you will never make a soccer player. How many players have been told that, and said, "I'll show them," and bounced back? You have to practise and train every spare moment you have. No one can make it to the top on two nights a week at training and a match on the weekend.

You have to become an athlete as well as a soccer player to succeed at profes-



sional level. Ron Smith, the head coach at the Australian Institute of Sport, uses a simple test based on 20 metre shuttle runs in a fixed time period. "If you are not fast enough to complete those in the time allowed, you will never be in a position to reach the ball in a top class game," he points out. You have to be physically strong to resist the challenges which are inseparable from soccer around the world. So that means supervised work in the gymnasium to build up the right kind of muscles without sacrificing flexibility and suppleness. Young Australians tend to lack these qualities, perhaps because of the reduction in physical education and gym work in schools. When a group of under-13 Victorians trained at the Hennef Sportschule in Bonn in Germany under one of the leading coaches, he pointed out that although the Australians were as tall and well-developed as their German counterparts, they were much stiffer and less flexible and this meant that their touch with the ball was lacking. So work on suppleness as well as strength. The Brazilians train to music much of the time, and that



S. Carey, R. Mc Gowan, E. Rea, Finals National U 16 Girls Championships in Hobart in July of this year. ACT - Victoria 1-0

does not seem to do them any harm.

Above all, join a good club which has qualified coaches and which takes an interest in its young players, not just on winning trophies. All junior coaches nowadays are required to have undertaken training. You don't want someone to train you in bad habits, for these will take time and effort to eradicate. Look for a club where youngsters are regularly put forward for regional and state development squads and talent identification sessions. Good performance there can mean selection for a representative team and exposure to the top coaches in the area. This is also the basis for selection for the Victorian or similar state institutes of sport and the Australian Institute of Sport. Here a lucky few can spend their days combining school and personal development studies and soccer training at the highest level. The graduates of these institutes almost invariably are snapped up by the top clubs at state and national league level, and the evidence is that you are significantly more likely to be selected for Australian under-17, Youth, Olyroo and even Socceroo teams if you have come through this first class training.

There are not enough places in the Institutes to go around, so don't despair if you miss out. Soccer players develop at different rates, and many develop more slowly because of the struggles they have to undergo. You will gradually find that some more skilled players than yourself begin to drop away as they find they do not have the stamina and determination





Coca-Cola Soccerroos, Steve Horvat, Tony Popovic, Zeljko Kalac and Alex Tobin in the foreground Julie Murray and Lisa Casagrande.



to succeed which you are showing. Louis van Gaal, coach of Ajax Amsterdam, says, "Amsterdam's youths display certain traits from birth, such as capacity for learning quickly and being creative, the will to take on a leading role, determination and loyalty." Edgar Davids, another product of the Ajax system adds, "Every Ajax player feels a little pride throughout his career and is determined to stay at the top. But he is always conscious of having to improve constantly, because there are scores of other equally gifted and motivated young players hovering in the wings ready to swoop into your place".

You can make a living from Australian soccer at national league level at present. I spoke at length recently to David Cervinski of the Melbourne Knights who says that you can live on the earnings from soccer alone, if you live at home and don't have a wife and family to support. It would be much easier if the season were extended beyond the current 24 weeks, plus finals. Cervinski says you must be with a successful club, and one which has good administration and pays its players the contracted amounts and on time. Not all the leading clubs in Australia do this. Much of the players' income comes from incentive schemes, bonuses for winning games, particularly for reaching the finals. Then the players are in a better bargaining position vis-a-vis the clubs.

So far, this article has been addressing young male soccer players, but for the first time young Australian girls are beginning to see some prospect of similar opportunities. The ASF's junior development program specifically excludes any discrimination on grounds of gender or race. Reaching the finals of the World Cup in Sweden and the prospect of taking part as host in the Sydney 2000 Olympics have been an enormous boost to the women's game. Parallel talent identification schemes have been set up in each state and the Australian Youth Women's championship in Hobart was a huge success. The stars of this competition will form the nucleus of Australian representative teams in the next generation. Some of the current crop of Australian stars, including Michele Watson, have been offered sports scholarships in the United States, where women's soccer is exploding in popularity.

So a soccer career in Australia for talented young players - male and female - is something which is firmly on the agenda. The prospects are good, though much work still has to be done. It is certainly worth considering, but don't be too carried away by the glamour, there is a lot of hard work - and not a little luck - involved. •

BACK ROW Nicholas Rizzo, Michael Galluzzo, Harry Kewell, Ilija Prenzovski, John Maisano, Jane Talceviski **MIDDLE ROW** Nelson Delasio (Gear Manager), Brett Emerton, Chris Coyne, Luke Tomich, Robert Matosevic, Adam Broadbeck, Daniel Allsopp, Colin Azzopardi, Daniel Uch no, Victor Fernandez (Assistant Coach) **FRONT ROW** Michael Cunico, Nickolas Johns, John Hed son (Head of Delegation), Les Scheinflug (National Youth Coach), Clayton Bell (c), Sebastian Sinzic.

Swedish lessons

The Australian women's international team, the female Socceroos, returned from the 1995 F.I.F.A. Women's World Cup in Sweden ranked 10th in the world.

Being in the top 10 nations is not a bad achievement for a team of amateur players, drawn from a base of only 20,000 registered participants. Especially when you consider that the Chinese were full professionals with over 1,000,000 players to draw from and the Danish team was semi professional. These three teams were in the "Group of Death" that Australia was drawn in. If Australia had been drawn in the other group which had Canada, England and Nigeria it may well have obtained the elusive top eight ranking and which would have seen them on the Olympic stage at Atlanta in 1996. The reality of football in this level did not allow this, so everything is now full steam ahead for the World Cup in 1999 (probably in the USA) and then Sydney 2000, hopefully playing in front of 45,000 people at the Sydney Football Stadium.

The planning for these events will be based on the lessons learnt from the World Cup, and a lot of lessons were learnt at this level. The Australian team, due to the support of the Australian Sports Commission and the Australian Olympic Committee, had the best preparation that any Australian team had ever had. This included:

- Three preparatory tours;
- The World Cup qualification tournament for the Oceania confederation;
- Three competitive tournaments
- The FIFA World Cup.

The total win/loss record being:

	P	W	L	D	F	A
All Games	31	19	10	2	83	45
A Internationals	20	9	9	2	41	39

This excellent preparation made us competitive with the world leaders in the game. If we are to build on this, and everybody is determined to, then we must not only keep the level of preparation, but we must increase the intensity. As with the male Socceroos we are up against that incredible barrier of geographical isolation. European teams jump on a bus and in one hour play a competitive international... the Americans just jump on a plane! Another emerging problem is that some of our players are being tempted abroad, one in Denmark, one in Italy and two in Japan. Plus there is an impending exodus of youth talent to the USA college system. The international scenario is mirroring



◀ JULIE MURRAY (left) and Bridgette Starr in action at the Sydney Football Stadium.

Anissa Tann, Australia's most capped female Socceroo with 58 consecutive appearances, reports on the recent Women's World Cup and also looks at the future for the female Socceroos.

the male scenario of 10 years ago. It shows that female soccer is making rapid improvements and is now an exciting viable career path for a female athlete.

What are the lessons to be learnt from the test in Sweden? Perhaps the first response should come from Tom Sermanni, the coach of the team, and hopefully the coach through to the 2000 Olympics.

"Sweden was a footballing education for our team. But saying that, even with the benefit of hindsight I would not have changed the squad and would not have altered the team selection for the finals. I could not have faulted the effort of the players, just perhaps that the 100% effort of a lot of our players showed was either not up to the level needed, or was not good enough due to their long term preparation. To summarise, what we must do is that we must get better athletes who are also better footballers! Very

easy to say but only achievable with long term programs.

"The key will be for a broad base of talented players to be training at a high level of intensity on a more frequent basis.

"The other reality is that a couple of the top players in the leading teams, such as Germany, could easily have held their own in the NSL. As any player will tell you TV coverage slows the game down, a lot of these players were like lightning."

Tom Sermanni suggests an Intensive Training Centre program (ITC). The ITC program will be the breeding ground for our future Socceroos. The first few should emerge in 1999 and the 2003 World Cup squad will no doubt all have come through this system. The ITC system is a superb development for young female players. They are getting top class coaching from experienced, full time



accredited coaches, including Jeff Oliver, Mike Milovanovic, Greg Brown, Tony Walmsley, Kevin McCormack and Mark Jones, and the benefit of future female coaches being trained such as Connie Selby, Leigh Wardell, Karen Menzies and Katrina Alexander.

The syllabus of the ITC not only includes football coaching but also other areas such as weight training, nutrition and lifestyle programs. The key now is for a strong state based women's competition to be developed in each state (such as the WSL in Sydney), and for these players to have not only intensive training but regular intensive competition.

Peter Hugg, the Executive Director of the AWSA who was also at the World Cup liaising with the FIFA representatives, added,

"The top six teams in the world (Norway, Germany, USA, China, Denmark and Sweden) showed us that there is a great deal of work to be done. The good thing is that we are certainly on a par with nations such as England, Japan, Brazil and Canada.

◀ SARAH COOPER a member of the Australian women's team, in control of the ball.



Female soccer is gaining in credibility through the efforts of our elite players and the volume of media coverage is making our players become 'known'.



Our goal must be at the administrative level to ensure that our funding stays at a level to be competitive at our present standard, and find further corporate funds to bridge the gap to the top six. I know our board is working hard to achieve these major goals and our state federations are implementing exciting programs to not only increase our playing base but ensure that the ITC programs will obtain maximum benefits.

"Female soccer is gaining in credibility through the efforts of our elite players, and the volume of media coverage is making our players become 'known'. This is illustrated by leading sports companies who are now sponsoring players (Oakley with Lotto, Tann with Reebok and Wheeler with Reusch).

Also we are delighted that a company such as Ram are sponsoring our soccer balls and we are having extensive talks to develop this sponsorship. The World Cup was a great promotional vehicle for us and we are going to build on this. I met with the National Teams Director for the USA team and we are happy to develop a close relationship in the future. Our aim is to get the best teams in the world here for our supporters to see just how good they are."

What was also a great breakthrough in Sweden was the utilisation of female Socceroos in management capacities. Michelle Sawyers and Moya Dodd not only were superb at their job but understood players as they had been through a World Cup campaign.

The players' view of the World Cup is, of course, vitally important. Our two new "superstars" Lisa Casagrande and Michelle Watson, who have both been offered lucrative USA scholarships, felt that the World Cup was so different to what they expected. Both had spent time at the AIS with the boys' program and Watson said that the major lesson that coach Ron Smith had been hammering into them was true...keep the ball moving. Watson said: "Every time I put my foot on the ball in the World Cup I lost it! The pace was incredible, the games seem to fly by and I was totally exhausted at the end of each game."

It must be added, though, that Watson was superb in midfield for Australia and rose to a level that proved she was a class player on the world stage. She and Casagrande will be the key players in the next decade for Australia.

At the other end of the spectrum Kym Lembray who made her interna-

tional debut in 1984, has had first hand experience in the playing evolution of female soccer.

"The game is not the same. When I first started playing there was dribbling in the game and a few players stood out. That's not the case now, the game is all about one or two touches and heaps more running. The days of the strolling star player are gone, all players are athletes and do a job in both attack and defence. To be honest, only Julie Dolan could have bridged the gap to today's team."

On a personal level, the whole concept of playing sweeper changed as droves of players came through and sweeping became marking. The harsh truth is that we must get a broader talent base of athletes who are comfortable on the ball. Long term the ITC program is the answer, however, in the short term the national squad must train with the elite male youth players and totally immerse themselves in watching and thinking about football. There are no short cuts to this level.

Having now played against the majority of the best female players in the world I am going to pick my dream team. In 2003 I am convinced there will be a few Aussies in this team.

▲ **FEMALE SOCCEROOS** before departing on their quest for soccer's ultimate prize—the World Cup.

dreamteam

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SWEEPER Sundhage (Sweden)
MARKERS John (Germany), Jakobson (Sweden)
MIDFIELD Mohr (Germany), Hamm (USA), Madsen (Denmark), Riise (Norway), Wiegman (Germany)
STRIKERS De Belo (Brazil), Aarones (Norway)
SUBS Christensen (Denmark), Neld (Germany), Jensen (Denmark), Rego (Brazil), Leidinge (Sweden).

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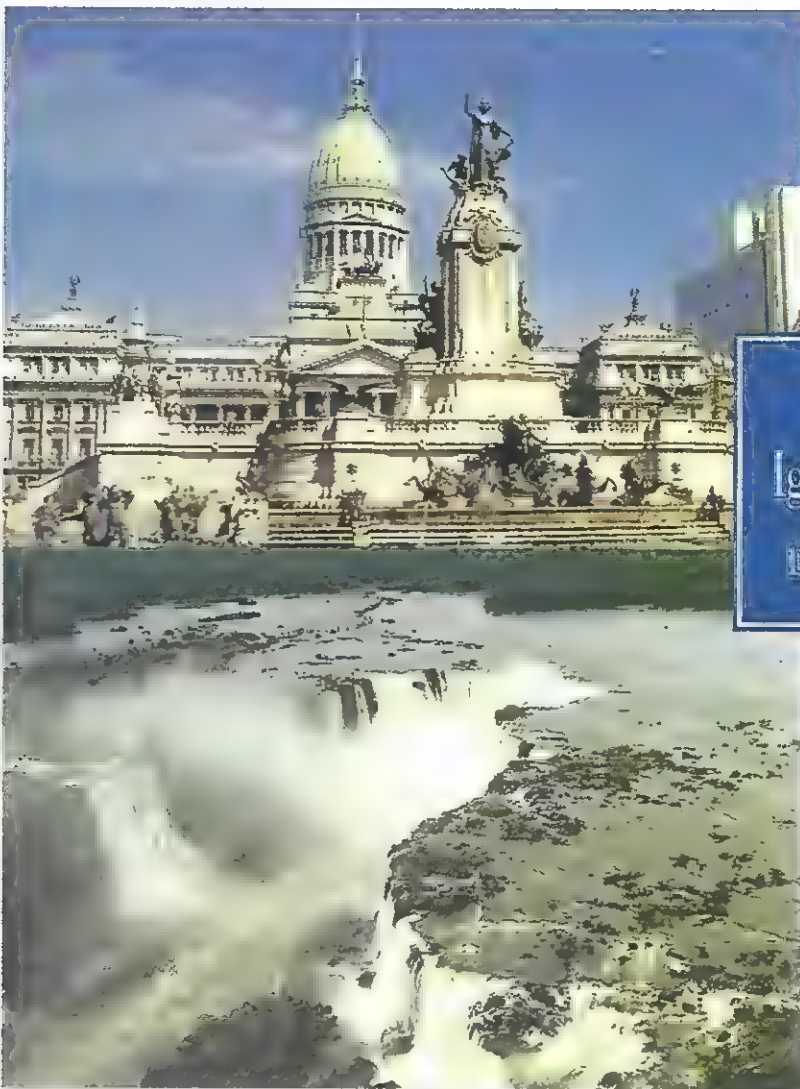


Weah wants it all



Liberia's George Weah has signed up with Italian giants AC Milan. Having already made a name for himself in Germany and France, Soccer Australia takes a look at the star African striker.





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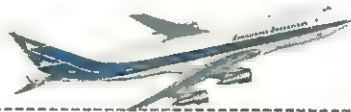
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Weah wants it all

George Oppong Weah considers himself to be the wandering ambassador of football for his native Liberia.

The star striker spends most of his time jetting between North America, Europe and Africa. He is either playing, spreading the football word or trying to gain support for the Liberian Football Association.

But things have not always been so glamorous for Weah who, like so many other African football stars, had a tough time growing up and saw sport as a way to succeed in life.

"I had a very difficult childhood which made me grow up quickly," Weah said. "My parents were separated and I was brought up by my grandmother, Emma, in the suburbs of Monrovia.

"There were 13 of us in the family and my grandmother had only the bare necessities. From an early age I tried to make a living selling popcorn and toffee apples - I wanted to be independent, master of my own life."

Weah said he did not hate school but thought it was a waste of his time.

"All those hours in class prevented

me from playing football - nothing else mattered. When I was 15, sport changed my life. I was in a good team and playing at championship level. I learned to listen and respect others - I became another person."

After starting as a goalkeeper, Weah became a striker. He played for clubs with such colourful names as Young Survival, Clara Town, Bongrange Company, Mighty Barolla and Invincible Eleven.

In 1987, Weah transferred to Cameroon with Tommocou Yaounde for \$5000. It was a good deal for the club which later sold Weah to Munich for one million French francs.

"Munich, with its sun and warmth, was the ideal city to start my European journey. Perhaps in another city I might have had greater difficulties."

Weah started in the first team 10 weeks into the 1988-89 championship.

"We lost 3-0 certainly a depressing start which I was able to put out of my mind thanks to the moral support of coach Arsene Wenger.

"I stayed in Munich for years and had

a lot of satisfaction, then I decided to leave to prove to myself that I was a good player."

Weah left Munich for Paris Saint-Germain in the northern summer of 1992 for 50 million francs.

"In Paris I found a warm and enthusiastic welcome - it was an ambitious team with big ideas and it worked well. PSG is now one of Europe's best clubs and has become so in such a short time."

However, PSG's coach, Artur Jorge, was not very happy with Weah playing in the Liberian national team.

"The national team is very important to me. I started to play for it in 1986 and I have played more than 40 games. I am the oldest and most experienced player in the team. I am like an older brother to the players, if I didn't play it would be like betraying my own people."

Weah said the Liberian Football Federation is very poor and overseas based players pay their own expenses and contribute to the running of the team.

"We only play official games because we do not have the money to play friendly ones and we get together in the evening

before the games.

"I feel very proud when I play in the national team. Even when I am tired and injured I cannot leave the field and leave my team mates on their own. When I come back after a game with the national team, I always play better."

Weah often supplies local teams with gear from France and the US. His superstar status is reflected in the 16 room mansion he has in Monrovia and the property he owns in New York, the native city of his wife Clare. They have two children, George junior and Marta.

"I love the USA," Weah said. "In New York I lead a very simple and quiet life because nobody knows me."

Weah is hesitant about his move to Milan.

"After my time with Munich and Paris Saint-Germain I have nothing further to show," he said. "I am playing with Milan even though my favourite team other than Munich is Juventus."

"I hope to keep playing until I am 35 or 36. I should finish my career with Munich and then go back to Liberia and work with young people." ♦

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National Soccer League

Everything you wanted to know, but **didn't know** who to ask.

Did you know that there have been 10,500 goals scored since the NSL started in 1977?

Did you know the longest undefeated streak was Leichhardt's 22 game run in the 1986-87 season? **Did you know** that John Kosmina was the first person to score in the NSL way back in 1977? **Soccer Australia** has exclusive access to a wealth of statistical detail which is reproduced in part here and compiled by our contributor Andrew Howe. If you would like to delve further into the facts and figures of the NSL, keep an eye out for the **official NSL Year Book** which will be in your newsagents in **September**.

The final round of the 1994-95 NSL season marked the 500th regular season round, (not including finals) since the NSL kicked off on 2 April 1977.

A total of 3898 regular season games have been played in this period, with exactly 10,500 goals recorded.

Results that weren't

The NSL has witnessed 6 games that had their scoreline changed after the game by the NSL tribunal:

Date	Match	Original	Revised	Reason Scoreline
11 March 1979	Newcastle v South Melbourne	2-1 Newcastle	3-0 Newcastle	South Melbourne fielded ineligible player (Tony Turner - unregistered)
18 March 1979	Sth Melbourne v Sydney Olympic	1-0 Sth Melbourne	3-0 Olympic	Sth Melbourne fielded ineligible player (Tony Turner - unregistered)
25 March 1979	Heidelberg v Sth Melbourne	2-2	3-0 Heidelberg	Sth Melbourne fielded ineligible player (Tony Turner - unregistered)
30 June 1985	Marconi v Leichhardt	4-0 Marconi	0-0 Leichhardt got comp. points	Marconi fielded ineligible player (Tony Henderson - unregistered)
5 April 1987	Heidelberg v Melbourne JUST	3-0 Heidelberg	3-0 Melbourne	Heidelberg fielded ineligible player (Scott Fraser - unregistered)
23 August 1987	Leichhardt v Melbourne Knights	1-1	3-0 Leichhardt	Melbourne Knights fielded ineligible player (Matthew Tomas - unregistered)

Games that weren't

Actually we should say only 3897 games have been completed. Only one game in NSL history has been abandoned with no replay - the infamous Battle of Pratten Park where, on 7 July 1985, the match between Sydney Olympic and Sydney City was called off after 35 minutes, with the scoreline of 1-0 to City allowed to stand.

Goals

Of the 10,500 goals recorded, 5,944 have been scored by the home team, 4,556 by the away team. These totals exclude goals scored in penalty shoot-outs. The 10,000th goal mark was passed (unnoticed) on 6 March 1994, when substitute Gerry Gomez headed in Parramatta's goal in their 1-1 away game at Sydney United.

Goals per game

Over the first 19 NSL regular seasons, an average of 2.69 goals have been scored per game. The season with the highest average goals per game was 1978 (2.92 goals per game), while the lowest was 1991-92 (2.32). The 1994-95 season was the fourth highest on record, with 2.87 goals scored per game on average (not including penalty shoot-out goals of course).

Drawn matches (in normal time) have occurred in 1021, or in 26 percent of all 3898 regular season games.

The highest number of goals in any regular season game was 13 (Adelaide City v Mooroolbark 10-3 Olympic Sports Field, 4 September 1977).

Not surprisingly, this game saw the highest number of goals by the home team (Adelaide City).

The most number of goals scored by a team away from home is 8 by Marconi (v Heidelberg 8-1 - Olympic Village, 18 June 1977).

The greatest winning margin was 9 goals by Marconi (v Blacktown 9-0 - Marconi Stadium, 16 March 1980).

The highest scoring drawn game was 4-4 (Marconi v Adelaide City - Marconi Stadium, 1 April 1979).

The highest number of goals scored by a losing team is 4. This occurred 4 times, and the scoreline in all 4 of these games was 5-4. This happened to Sydney Olympic (v Sydney City, 5 July 1981), Wollongong City (v Marconi, 15 May 1983), Brisbane City (v Melbourne SC, 19 May 1995) and Leichhardt (v South Melbourne, 20 March 1988).

The greatest 'turnaround' in consecutive regular season games is 13 goals - Wollongong City beat West Adelaide 7-0 on 18 March 1990, but in their next game one week later lost 0-6 to St George, both games at Brandon Park. •

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The off-season gives fans a chance to pursue other pastimes, but for someone like Sydney United coach Branko Culina, football is now a full-time occupation. He spoke to Sam Prenesti.

Off-season, but not off duty

People who talk about the future of soccer in this country often mention the need for the game to turn 'professional'.

The image they have is of part-time players running around on a weekend in front of fans and club administrators who participate because they love the game, and then take long breaks during the off-season. When it comes to Branko Culina, however, the image could not be further from the truth.

As the coach of Sydney United, Culina is proof that, in some respects, our game could not be more professional. He is renowned for the amount of research and study he puts into the game and is recognised as one of the NSL's bright young coaches.

After a sluggish start, Culina took United to the minor semi-final before bowing out of the 1994/95 competition. But while United supporters could turn their attention to other pursuits over the winter months, Culina immediately went to work analysing the season that had just passed, and planning for the future.

He started by looking at the players' performances.

"I had a written report about every player and every game, and I made graphs of the player's performance in each game to see what sort of pattern there was," Culina said.

"Then I invited every player to discuss the season and they would tell me what they thought in both written and verbal form."

This in depth soul search took a month to complete after the season and provided valuable information, according to Culina.

"We analyse the information and we say 'OK, we know where we fell down and where we did play well, what needs to be done next season to change it'."

Performance is not the only area that is looked at, attitude and discipline also come under the microscope.

"There is a lot of talk around the club that we were treated harshly by the referees," Culina said. "But having said that we have to look further and decide how we even overcome that problem – and if the referees were in the right, let's look at what we did that we shouldn't have done."

Culina also closely analyses his own performance.

"The first thing I do each year is set myself an objective for the season," he said. "At the end of the year you ask did I achieve it and, if not, why didn't I?"

"As a coach I divide it into things such as was I happy with training? Was I happy with the tactical preparation of my team?"

Sometimes this involves swallowing

some bitter pills.

"For example, I stuffed up when we played Adelaide City in Adelaide when we lost the game 3-0," Culina said. "I stuffed up because my instructions to the players were wrong... but there are also games where we were tactically very good and got something out of the game we didn't expect."

When not analysing his own performance or the detailed information he has gathered, Culina, who has the title of Coaching Director, spends the off-season organising youth teams and coaches and going to as many as three games a week.

This means that before an untested NSL player is invited to train with the club, the United coach has already probably seen him play half a dozen times.

While Culina is not the only coach in the league to go through this thorough analysis in the off-season, he does concede that some coaches may see it as unnecessary. One thing he does share with all coaches, however, is the problem of managing playing staff during the chaotic transfer period.

"Sometimes it's difficult to know who you are actually going to keep at the club, something might come out of the blue," he said.

"We all knew all along that Kalac would go, but then we lost people like



Hristodoulou who I didn't plan on losing, Petkovic retired... Bilokapic went overseas and decided to stay and now there is some talk that Lamond is moving to another club.

"All of these things happen without you really planning, so you can't sit down and say 'Well, I want to replace so-and-so'. In the back of your mind you know what you need but then all of a sudden two or three other players leave and you are in more strife than you first thought."

So while Culina only has a certain amount of control over the players who will be at his disposal, he pays attention to the aspects of being a coach he does control, such as self-improvement.

Culina admits he is a great investor in videos of and about the game and he also delves into the world of business management techniques.

"One of the things I would like to see happen here is for clubs to invest in their coaches and possibly send them overseas for a few weeks just to update and improve their knowledge," he said, "I think we are so far away from everyone that sometimes we get left out."

"I think what you have to do is update your knowledge and increase it all the time, you have to be prepared to learn something new all the time – unless you do that, you fall behind."

Given his thirst for knowledge and information, and his full-time passion for the greatest game on earth, there seems little chance of Branko Culina ever falling behind when it comes to coaching at the highest level in Australia.



England - Paradise Revisited

English football is now attracting first class foreign talent with the likes of Bergkamp and Gullit set to line up in the Premier League next season. Philip Micallef reports on the rejuvenation of the game in England.

Only a few months ago English football's idea of a foreign player was some second-rate performer from neighbouring Denmark, Sweden or Norway.

Quality players from this part of the world who were not good enough to make it in the big leagues of Spain, Germany or Italy often ended up in the English premiership.

English clubs simply could not compete with the mega-rich continentals.

But not any more.

The elite Premier League has created a product that has become highly attractive to television, sponsors and advertising.

And the upshot of the bloodless 90s revolution is that there is infinitely more money in English football now than there was in the 70s and 80s. Top English clubs can now afford to buy some of the best foreign talent available.

The value of foreign stars was first appreciated by Tottenham Hotspur in the late 70s.

In one sensational swoop the north London club signed two of Argentina's World Cup winning members, Osvaldo Ardiles and Ricardo Villa.

The move was greeted with scepticism by Britain's conservative soccer fraternity.

But the pessimism was ill founded.

The South American duo were an instant hit at White Hart Lane and added a sadly lacking dose of flair and artistry to the Spurs team, culminating in that unforgettable goal Villa scored in the 1981 FA Cup Final replay against Manchester City.

In the 90s the trickle of foreign stars became a flood.

Frenchman Eric Cantona, Russian Dimitri Kharine, Dane Peter Schmeichel, Belgium's Philippe Albert, Holland's Bryan Roy, Swede Stefan Schwarz, Ukraine's Andrei Kanchelskis, Romania's Giga Popescu, Germany's Jurgen Klinsmann and our own Mark Bosnich all turned their noses at continental soccer to sign for prominent English clubs.

This year the "foreign legion" has been expanded with the arrival of top

Dutch pair Ruud Gullit and Dennis Bergkamp, who joined London sides Chelsea and Arsenal respectively.

It remains to be seen whether the Dutchmen can succeed in resurrecting their careers after an unsettled time in Italy.

Gullit had mixed fortunes the last three years while gallivanting between Milan and Sampdoria while Inter's

Gullit had mixed fortunes the last three years while gallivanting between Milan and Sampdoria



Bergkamp failed to adjust to the rigours of Italian football and all the pressures that go with it.

For all its faults, English football has suddenly become very appealing to the world's greatest players.

There has been a genuine all-round effort to put more skill in the game which is appreciated by the more gifted players, who also feel honoured to play in such a passionate environment where the fans are so close to the players, not only physically but spiritually.

Of course, the influx of foreign stars has boosted the quality of football in the Premier League considerably.

One can see, by watching English soccer on television on Monday nights, that the quality of play has improved substantially although the lesser clubs



still seem to favour the "long ball game".

English soccer is perhaps not as sophisticated as that in Italy, Spain or Germany - but a lot more happens in an English game. However, the standard is certainly better than that dished up in the second half of the 80s, for example, when English football was as imaginative and attractive as English rugby today.

Klinsmann said last year that he was amazed by the loyalty of Spurs fans and what the FA Cup meant to the average fan.

Italy's Roberto Baggio declared while deliberating on his future last month, that he would very much like to play for Real Madrid, Barcelona or Manchester United. Real and Barca are understandable, but why United? Because "English football has turned the corner", he said.

With this wealth of foreign talent one wonders how long it will take for English clubs to start grabbing a major share of the European club honours as they did in the 70s.

There is no question that, more than ever, the secret behind international success these days lies in the acquisition of foreign stars.

What would Milan have been with-

out the three Dutchmen, Gullit, Van Basten and Rijkaard? And Barcelona without Koeman, Romario and Stochkov?

Fifteen years ago any English club would have been automatically considered among the favourites to carry off any Euro cup they entered simply because of the quality of the championship they represented.

But after the shambles in Brussels in 1985 that led to English football's five-year ban from European competitions, the game in England stagnated and the threat of English clubs became less serious when they were allowed back in 1991.

True, Arsenal and Manchester United both won the Cup Winners' Cup but it was more the exception than the rule and the competition has never reflected supremacy in Europe in the same way the Champions Cup does.

Football has become a multi-million dollar entertainment industry and nothing but the best will satisfy the paying customers, whether they are spectators at the grounds or TV viewers at home.

It is for this reason that English football has invested in foreign talent in an expensive bid to climb back to the top of world football.

Make no mistake, England is nicely poised to become a major force at club level. But will the "foreign legion" stifle the growth of local talent, thus affecting the national team?

Now that's another matter... *



Paul Gascoigne (R) shakes hands with Henrik Larsson of Sweden.

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The Genius

Both the burden and joy of AC Milan supporters, the Montenegro born Dejan Savicevic expresses the most appreciated interpretation of soccer: genius and insanity. Inconsistent but full of fantasy, extremely intelligent even when not in a playing mood, he has already won two Champions Cups and five Italian premierships.

It is not that he fears ruffling his chestnut-coloured curls that precludes Dejan Savicevic from using his head in playing. Neither is it true that his right foot is superfluous; it's just that his left foot alone is more than adequate to make his playing sublime. His role model is Maradona "the greatest of them all" and, like Diego, he succeeds at being the best, even if he only uses one foot.

Why then have the Milanesi supporters spent sleepless nights worrying about this mysterious champion from Podgorica?

Podgorica is a beautiful city of about 100,000 people in Montenegro. There is no civil war there, but they still have a high regard for Italy. More precisely, they think about Bari because it is the closest city on the other side of the Adriatic.

And Savicevic has a special relationship with Bari: when he was a star of Yugoslav soccer, he used to go to Bari two or three times a year to shop. In 1991, he demonstrated that he was the only star in Yugoslav soccer, winning with Red Star the final of the Champions Cup against Marseille. In January this year, still in Bari, he ended his long and inexplicable drought scoring four goals against Bari. Four goals to make us recall the reasons why Silvio Berlusconi wanted him in the red and black.

Savicevic's career in Yugoslavia was glorious always playing in the first division: six years with Buducnost of Podgorica and four years with Red Star of Belgrade.

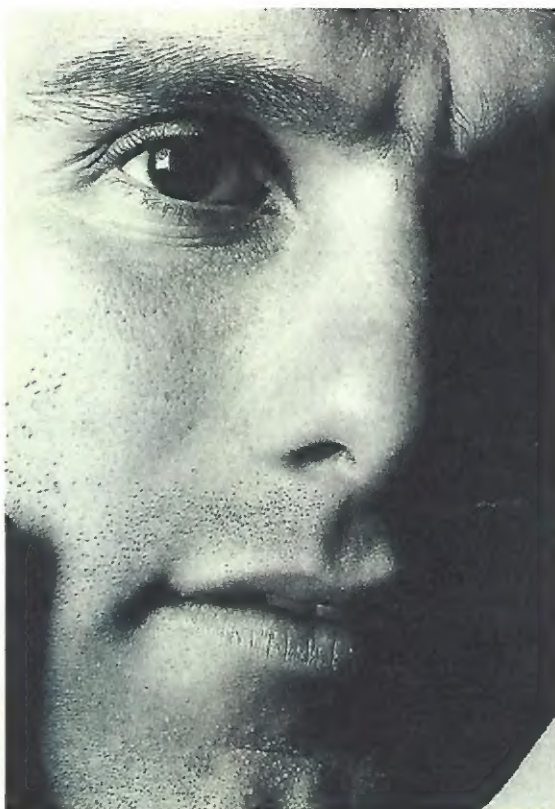
His first international appearance for Yugoslavia was in 1988. Skipping Red Star as midfielder he won three national championships, a Yugoslav Cup, a Champions Cup and the International Cup in Tokyo against the Chilean team Colo Colo.

With AC Milan, on the other hand, Savicevic, has had many problems, and only a few first class performances, perhaps only really reaching his potential on the evening of 18 May 1994 in Athens, when he led Milan to their fifth Champions Cup, winning 4-0 against Barcelona.

"In the beginning I had a lot of problems," recalls Dejan, "and I was unhappy, because I've always been in the first 11 and I arrived here and did not play... and when I played I was not able to give my best. I was prepared to leave because when a person like me is unable to perform satisfactorily, and knows he can, he feels frustrated."

And what kind of problems did you encounter?

"Physical problems, an injury which



would not heal, a twisted ankle which even when it healed left a weakness in the right leg, making me rely too much on the left leg, and subsequent muscular problems."

You soccer players don't do anything except exercise and incur injuries...

"Soccer is a serious game, there is nothing else to it."

So someone like you must be frightened of what might happen when he goes onto the field?

"I've never been afraid. If I see that my opponent tries to get the better of me illegally I try to avoid thinking about it. I am not a person who after one bad tackle runs away."

Do you have any secrets, some type of magic perhaps?

"No, I only try to do my best. In Yugoslavia the game is not as strong as it is here. That is what I misunderstood in

my early days with Milan. 100% performance in every game."

What opened your eyes to this?

"All the team, all the players from Baresi, Maldini, Tassotti, Massaro, they give 100% in every game. That is why Milan is a winner."

Savicevic talks and smiles because he is at ease with himself. His wish to leave Italy did not last long. Even his wife Valentina envisages a great future in Italy when Savicevic's career is over. Savicevic remains, above all, a boy born to play soccer. He started playing for fun before it became a passion that dominated his entire existence. But he never saw himself as a great player.

How old were you when you started to play seriously?

"About 14."

Did you think this was late in life?

"In hindsight, it was not late. I spent

all my time playing street soccer with my friends."

Who taught you to be a champion or, better still, who made you realise that you were a champion?

"When I joined Red Star I had already played in the national team and therefore knew that I could play well. I was influenced by two or three coaches when I started playing. Firstly, the coach from Buducnost who trusted me at only 18 years of age and who gave me the chance of becoming one of the best players in Yugoslavia."

In your opinion does a champion emanate in the mind, in the heart or in the feet?

"It is ability above all. Everything comes from the head. But if you don't have good feet, you have no chance of becoming a good player. Head and feet together. As for the heart! What does this really mean?"

You are 28 years old and in full swing as a player. What are your weak points?

"Perhaps my right leg and aerial skills."

Do you need your right leg only for walking?

"Yes, but even Maradona only uses his left leg."

Do you not go for headers so as not to upset your curls?

"No, it is because I started playing as a midfielder, now I play as a striker. Therefore I advance more but it is difficult to perfect the aerial duels."

Have you ever been jealous of anyone?

"No, I'm capable of being upset with someone but never jealous."

You mentioned Maradona as your role model?

"I've only seen Pele on videos, while I've played against Maradona. He is the best player that I've seen, then follows Platini, Van Basten, Gullit and Baggio who is now the best in the world."

Are you ill tempered? Perhaps with players who ruffle you?

"No, I make no pretences at being perfect. Let us say that I'm a hard headed man, a typical Montenegrin. However, I am pretty good - that's all."

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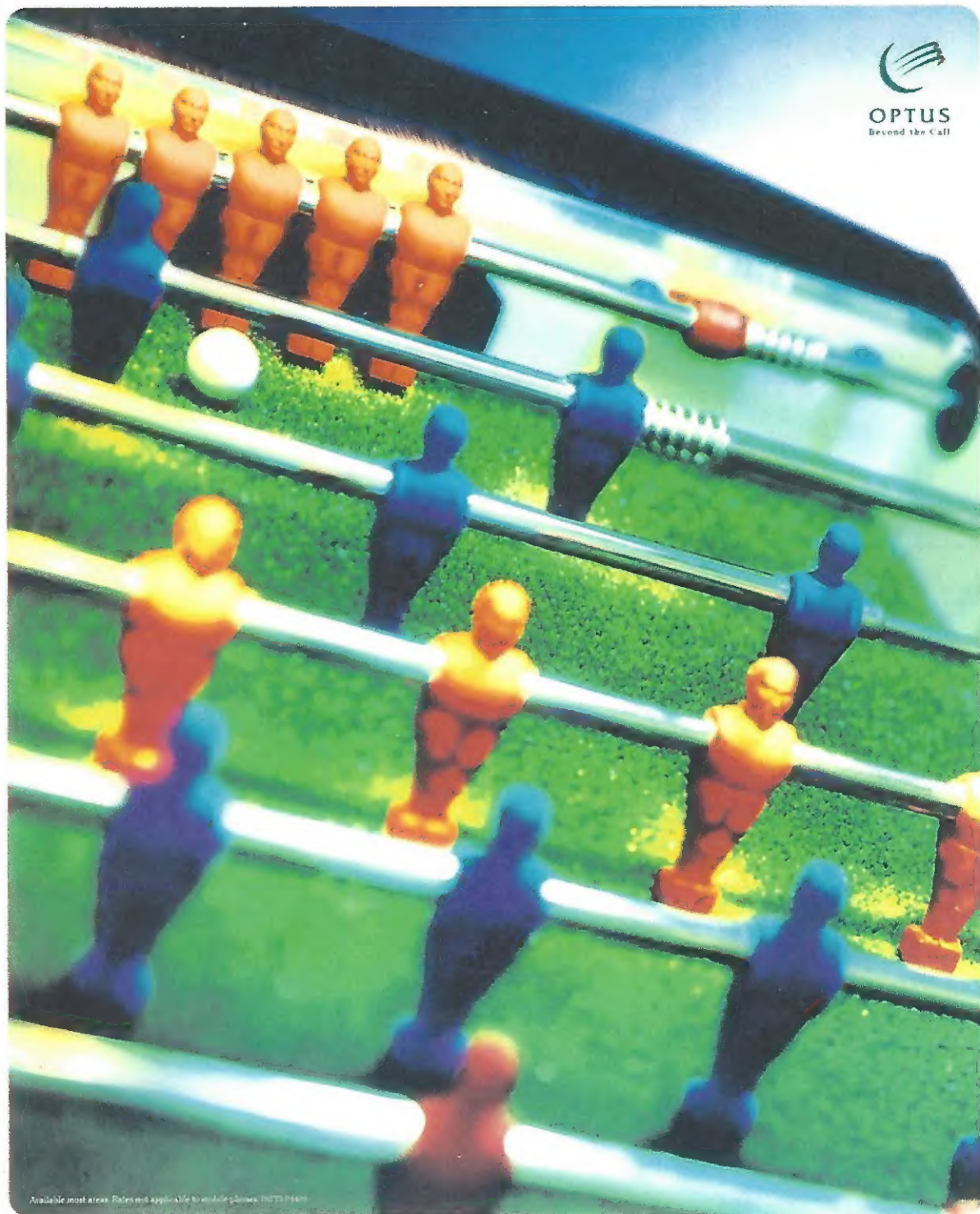
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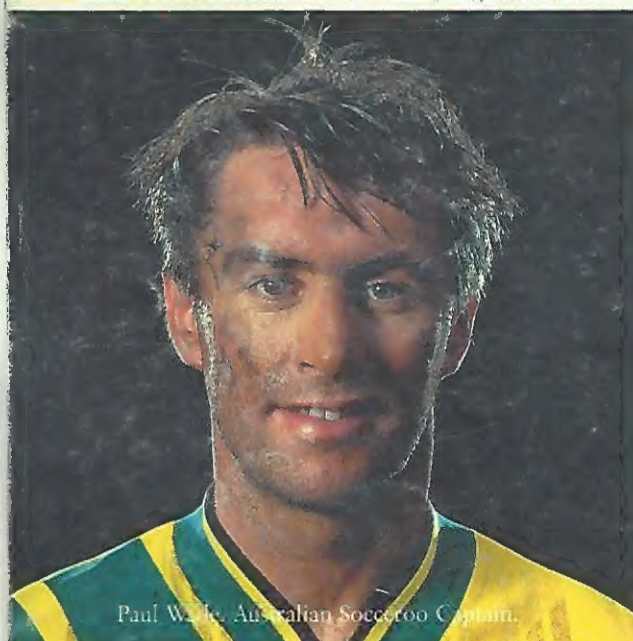
Available most areas. Rates not applicable to mobile phones. ©2003 Optus



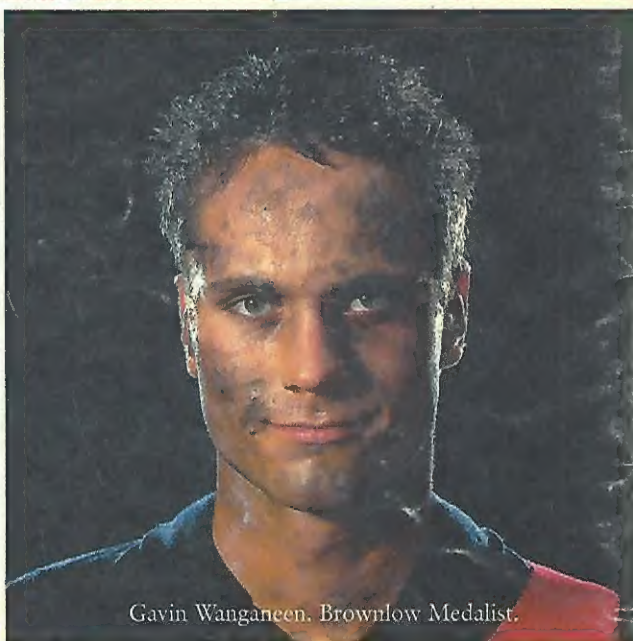
Jamini Martyn, Captain Australia A



Mark Sargent, Captain Newcastle Knights.



Paul Walker, Australian Soccer Captain.



Gavin Wanganeen, Brownlow Medalist.

They fly Ansett Australia. (They shower first.)

Fly with us and you're quite likely to be flying with one of the many heroes of Australian sport, because Ansett Australia is Australian sport. We sponsor the AFL, Australian Soccer Federation, Australian

Cricket Board and Rugby League (as well as the Australian Sports Commission).

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